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SF 501 Introduction to Spiritual Formation

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Asbury Theological Seminary
SF 501 "Introduction to Spiritual Formation"
Spring, 2008

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Welcome

Welcome to Spiritual Formation. I love teaching this course. It provides us an arena for deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ, as well as furnishing another opportunity in the seminary curriculum to prepare us for our disciple-making ministries. Let's start by looking at the course description and my vision for the course.

Course Description: A survey that examines the theological and practical dimensions of the spiritual life. Lectures, class discussions and small-group disciplines are used. Students are encouraged to enrich their own personal spiritual life and are given guidelines for engaging in a ministry of spiritual formation in the local church.

My Own Vision for this Course

I can remember the motto of the Christian camp that I attended as a child. "To Know Him and to Make Him Known." Of course, when I first saw it posted high on the wall of the outdoor tabernacle, I thought it referred to us--the campers. I thought that the reason the camp existed was for people to get to know *us*...and to help *us* be known! By the end of the week I had committed my life to Jesus--and had come to understand that the camp motto meant something very different than I had thought. As time has passed, those words have become a kind of mission statement, framing the very purpose of my existence—"to know Him (Christ) and to make Him known."

Many years have passed since that special summer. I have to admit that I don't know God nearly so deeply as I wish I did. I thirst for more. So, being a "professor of spiritual formation" isn't (for me) "just" a job, and an area of study in which I enjoy working, it is also about a place of longing in my life. I really do want to know Him more deeply, and more fully embody his love for others.

I can't say for sure, but I would guess that this is part of what has brought *you* to this class. The most important thing, the central thing for you and me, is for us to experience the transforming power of Jesus in every aspect and situation of our lives, and participate with him in fulfilling his vision for the world. This is the way that we are shaped as spiritual leaders who are called to minister God's healing

grace for the broken, wounded, and lost in order to transform the very shape of our society.

So, how do we grow in grace? I hope that as the class continues you will create space in your life for cultivating your own relationship with Jesus, becoming increasingly attentive to God's presence and responsive to how he wants to work through you as an agent of his love for others each day. This class will have a powerful impact on each of us if we are thinking through the ideas, implementing them, integrating discoveries into our own lives and working out the implications in our relationships and for our circles of influence.

Goals and Objectives for the Class

I envision our work as comprising content, skills, and experience. (1) The course content will include an examination of some of the theological foundations for Christian spiritual (trans)formation, means by which we open ourselves to God's love, and the variety of approaches to Christian spirituality from which we can draw. (2) You will work on skills for personal appraisal as well as developing spiritual formation resources for others. (3) You will have the opportunity to deepen your relationship with Christ by engaging with the spiritual practices that are suited to your needs and your situation. (4) Using a journal, you will reflect on God's presence in your life, and experiences of embodying his love for others in your actions prayers as well as through your prayers.

My Philosophy of Teaching

My own approach to teaching has been greatly influenced by Malcolm Knowles' principles of *androgogy*. We are a class of adult learners. You need to know why we are spending time on a particular area, and told how it affects you directly. You have a lifetime of experiences that we will tap as a resource for what we do together. Members of our class will have varied levels of exposure to the themes we will work on in class, and I will try to be attentive to that. You probably learn best by practicing, so we will build in experiential components into almost every class session. You want to apply new knowledge and skills quickly, and not just be preparing yourself for some future ministry, so I will attempt to stay aware of that as I teach. We learn in a relational context, so I hope you will work with me to develop an environment for this kind of connection between us in our class generally, as well as in our small groups. If you have questions, or if you want to talk together, I hope you will feel free to connect with me after class. If we don't have enough time to talk then, we will schedule a time to meet. The last principle of androgogy that I will mention here is about your desire to "self-direct." You probably like to set goals for your own learning in the light of your present situation and needs. You will notice that in my approach to grading (see below) I attempt to respond to that.

Approach to Grading

Grading is done on the basis of a "contract". That means that you get to decide, in the light of present commitments, which grade will be your goal. You will also have the opportunity to think about what you need to grow, and you will have the opportunity to choose from several options for two of the primary course assignments. I need to make sure you realize that grades are not awarded only on the basis of the contract, but upon the quality of work done at the performance level you have chosen. For the purpose of assessment, there will be graded elements in the course.

I will always try to grade and return your essays within one week of their submission. My feedback will express what I think you've done well and how you might improve, or I might offer suggestions about other resources to check or ideas to consider. Since your spiritual autobiography represents a longer assignment and one that I respond to by a personal letter, rather than by a feedback-form, you may not hear back for 3 or 4 weeks.

Grade Expectations

For the "C-Level" contract...

- Read course texts (20 points)
- Write a Spiritual Autobiography (40 points)
- Attend class sessions (2 points deducted for unexcused absences)
- Achieve a minimum cumulative total of 50 out of 60 points

For the "B-Level" contract...

- fulfill C-Level expectations
- write two essays (worth 35 points each).
- keep a spiritual journal 4 out of 7 days a week. (30 points) and
- achieve a minimum cumulative total of 145 out of 160 points.

For the "A-Level" contract...

- fulfill C and B-level expectations
- present an approved project to the class and a project report to me (40 points)
- achieve a minimum cumulative total of 180 out of 200 points.

Texts

The seminary standard is to require 1200-1500 pages of text for a three-hour class. You will see that the number of pages in our text list is less than that. In order to provide you with time for the formative (compared to informative) reading required by this course.

- Marjorie Thompson, Soul Feast
- Reginald Johnson, Your Personality and the Spiritual Life

- Robert Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey
- Joyce Huggett, Listening to God

Later in the semester you may also be asked to purchase a class packet (consisting of “handouts” and worksheets) from our bookstore.

You will need to report your MBTI type on April 21 so that we can have the appropriate materials for your use for the module in our module, “Personality and Spirituality.” Here are a couple links to on-line sites where you can take a version of the MBTI:

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes1.htm>

<http://www.kisa.ca/personality/>

Class Structure

Learning happens through relationship and spiritual formation takes place within Christian community. That is why our class will be formed into small community groups. The purpose for these groups is simple, and I’ll be using the model outlined by Ruth Haley Barton, in *Sacred Rhythms*. “The small group gathers to listen to one another’s desire for God, to support one another in the spiritual practices that help us to seek God, and to assist one another in paying attention to the activity of God in our everyday lives and in our spiritual practices” (p.184). This means that persons in the class must be willing to be on a journey together and ready to support one another in finding life patterns that nurture desire for God.

All who take the class are asked to covenant together to...

- Be faithful in our own personal rhythm of spiritual practices
- Support and pray for one another as we seek to respond faithfully to God’s invitations.
- Respect each other’s spiritual journey.
- Create and maintain a safe environment for questions and wondering, practicing reflective listening, rather than feeling a necessity of coming up with answers.
- Seek to increase our own self-awareness and be appropriately self-disclosing.
- Pay particular attention to the times and ways in which God is moving in each person’s life and seek to affirm evidence of each person’s growth and transformation.
- Honor confidentiality.

Classroom environment

We assume respect for the classroom and our classmates. Drinks are allowed, but not food (unless you've brought enough for everyone!). We don't talk during times that are set aside for quiet. We are considerate when another "has the floor." We bind ourselves to confidentiality about what is shared.

Course Assignments

Guided Reflections. From time to time we may engage in guided reflections during class. Sometimes these may be assigned as homework. You will receive instructions for these creative writing assignments. Any sharing that we do from these exercises in our small groups will be non-manipulative and non-threatening, and is designed to help to foster trust and experience *koinonia*.

Spiritual Autobiography. This 8-10 page paper (double-spaced, typed) will relate stories from your life, showing the formative experiences which have brought you to this point. The stories are to trace early influences, significant persons, crucial milestones, defining moments, and important transitions or changes of your life. Not only will you recount the "outer facts" but also their inner meaning as well. *This assignment is due (hard copy) on March 25, 2008.*

Spiritual Journal. Journal entries shall be made 4 out of 7 days a week, not including Spring Break. They will be kept in a separate notebook and handed in for review on the days that I will announce in advance. I will review these during the time you are meeting in clusters. I will treat your journal as your own private material and will read selections only if you invite me to do so.

Essays. These papers will be 4-6 pages in length (double-spaced, typed). The *first* one is *due on April 24*. In it you are to draw from class presentations, and expected to show evidence of research, not only from the course text, but also from at least two other sources that address the spiritual implications of the MBTI. I will have several books available on our class reserve shelf that you can use. The paper is to be divided into two parts. In the first you will write about how your personality influences your spirituality (how your own unique temperament is evident in your spiritual "style" or patterns of your life of prayer and devotion). In the second half of the paper you will address and how your spirituality is impacting your personality (how your faithful following of Jesus is leading you to move beyond the comfort zone of your "personality preferences" and to balance in areas where you may have been one-dimensional).

The *second essay is due on or before May 13*. This is one of the assignments in which you have some choice. You may want to write on some course-related

theme (e.g., fasting, contemplation, retreats, etc.); issue or idea (e.g., busyness, inner healing, asceticism, etc.); person (e.g., Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, Henry Nouwen); or report on a “spiritual classic” you read for this class (see me for a list, or check your selection with me beforehand). This essay will evidence research, at least 2 sources other than our class texts (except in the case of the “classic”—see below). Footnotes (or endnotes) and bibliography are required. If your essay focuses upon a spiritual classic, you will read the classic and use the essay as a place to distill discoveries, insights, and reflections that have resulted from your thoughtful reading of the source. You are to open your essay with a brief biographical statement about the author. Your classic is the main reading, supplemented by at least one dictionary article that fills out more information about the author. Write cogently and present your material in a concise and well-organized fashion.

Or,

The second essay may take the form of *a report on a one day, personal retreat* that you take during the semester. By “one day” is meant a morning and afternoon, or an afternoon and evening, or an evening and the following morning. The purpose of your retreat is simply to be alone with God. Be open to whatever gifts God wants to give—insights, perspective, direction, or simply refreshment and rest. The report is to be between 3-4 pages in length. It is less simply because of the time required for the retreat. Organize your report into three parts:

- (a) What was going on in your life just prior to taking the retreat? In other words, what was the “context” of your retreat?
- (b) Where you go and how did you spend your time? What scriptures, readings or experiences did you process? What surfaced as you prayed?
- (c) Reflect on the meaning of the retreat with regard to “re-entry” into your relationships and responsibilities.
- (d)

Or,

Attend the “Abiding in Jesus” Spring Prayer Conference, led by Margaret Therkelsen. Write a 3-4 page personal response to this experience. In your response relate particular teaching sessions/content to your own spiritual journey, showing how questions arising from your journey connect with content from sessions; or how specific content from the event poses questions leading to deeper reflection your journey.

Two points will be deducted for each 24 hour period that a paper is late. Allowances will, of course, be made for medical emergencies or personal crises (e.g., death in the family).

The following grading rubric will be used for essays, obviously some elements below are more pertinent to a research/content-based essay; other elements are also applicable to a more experiential assignment.

- For “A” level work, the essay clearly and concisely states the thesis, question or theme to be undertaken. It presents its findings in an

exemplary fashion, particularly as regards concision and clarity. It draws a powerful conclusion that clearly relates to the theme. It contains no distractive material. It demonstrates clear evidence of deep and substantive reflection. It demonstrates exemplary research and use of sources (beyond the minimum required).

- For “B” level work, the essay: clearly states the thesis, question or issue to be undertaken. It contains few grammatical errors or misspellings. It presents its ideas in a reasonably clear and concise fashion. It draws a substantive conclusion that relates the research to the theme. It contains minimal distractive material. It demonstrates clear evidence of substantive reflection. It demonstrates cautions and substantive research and use of sources (beyond the required minimum).
- For “C” level work, the essay attempts to clearly state the thesis, theme or question to be undertaken. It contains frequent grammatical errors and/or misspellings. It presents its findings in a fashion that is hard to follow and exhibits too much “subjectivity,” i.e., is more of an opinion piece. The essay attempts to conclude in a fashion that relates the findings back to the thesis or theme. It contains significant distractive material. It demonstrates little evidence of substantive reflection. It demonstrates little evidence of substantive research, in other words, draws on the required minimum.
- For “D/F” level work, the essay largely fails to identify a thesis, question or theme. It contains many grammatical errors and/or misspellings. It presents little or no research and is mostly an opinion piece. It draws no meaningful conclusion. It evidences minimal or no evidence of substantive reflection or research.

Creative Project. Here is another course requirement (at least for those working on the A-level) where you have some choice. This assignment may take one of two forms.

You may choose an artistic mode (painting, sculpture, poetry, creative writing, photo meditation, original musical composition, etc.) in order to give expression to some aspect of your own spiritual journey. It is expected that the project will be a fresh work.

Or,

You may choose a project that communicates course-related ideas (e.g., lesson plans, sermon manuscript, newsletter articles, overhead transparencies, set of retreat talks, etc.). Your work should not only reflect your personal reflections, but also include appropriate connections with our course content (texts and/or teaching modules).

Important information about the Creative Projects:

- The Project represents a significant course assignment. You are to invest *a minimum of ten hours* in the preparation of your project. Some will spend much more time than that.
- Your project will be shared in class at the end of the semester.
- Please get prior approval from me before doing your project. Your project proposal is due in a written form on *March 8*. This is to include a clear and succinct statement of the purpose of your project as well as the objectives for your presentation to the class.
- In addition to your presentation to the class, you will also submit a report that includes:
 - A log of your time investment.
 - For art-based projects: submit a one-page discussion of the connection between your project and your own spiritual journey; For text-based projects (including power-point presentations) submit a one-page discussion of how your theme fits with a ministry for spiritual formation.

Grading Criteria for Projects

- Did you spend at least 10 hours in the preparation of the project?
- Was your presentation to the class clear and within the time-frame allowed?
- How well did your written interpretation/discussion of your project integrate course content with personal reflection? Does your project demonstrate a connection between course content and your personal journey?
- How well prepared was your written interpretation/discussion (writing style, spelling, grammar, etc.)?

SF501 SP(08) Course Calendar

02/12	Connecting & Syllabus	<i>For next class, fill out "Growth Goals" and "Spiritual Life Inventory" (in course packet)</i>
02/14	Spiritual Journal	<i>Bring in your completed "Growth Goals" sheet and your "Spiritual Life Inventory" form. Journal keeping begins today!</i>
02/19	Guest: Jim Dunn	
02/21	Remembering Your Story	<i>MBTI letters due today</i>
02/26	"Forming a Small Christian Community"	<i>Mulholland, Ch. 1 Small groups assigned today</i>
02/28	Small Groups: Sharing Our Stories	<i>Mulholland, Ch. 2 Groups meet</i>
03/04	True Spirituality (groups meet)	<i>Thompson 1</i>
03/06	Jesus' Apprentices	<i>Mulholland, Ch. 3</i>
03/11	Life Together (groups meet)	<i>Mulholland Ch. 4</i>
03/13	Spiritual Reading: (groups meet)	<i>Thompson 2, Project Proposal Due</i>
03/18	Prayer as Relationship	
03/20	Intro to MBTI	<i>Johnson, 1-2, and "your chapter"</i>
03/25	Prayer as Cooperation	<i>Spiritual Autobiography due Thompson 3</i>
03/27	Giftedness	<i>Johnson, 3-5; Mulholland, 5</i>
04/01	Reading Week	
04/03	Reading Week	
04/08	Prayer as Communion	<i>Johnson 6-8, Thompson 4</i>
04/10	Infirmities & Vulnerabilities	<i>Mulholland, Ch. 6</i>
04/15	Prayer as Contemplation	<i>Johnson 9-10, Thompson 5</i>
04/17	Nurture & Growth	<i>Mulholland, Ch. 7</i>
04/22	Prayer as Celebration	<i>Thompson 6</i>
04/24	Intentional Ministry: Big Picture	<i>First essay due</i>
04/29	TBA	<i>Mulholland, Ch. 8-11 Thompson 7</i>
05/01	TBA	<i>Mulholland, Ch. 12-13</i>
05/06	Intentional Ministry: Retreat Leading	<i>Thompson 8</i>
05/08	Festival of Spiritual Formation	
05/13	Festival of Spiritual Formation	<i>Essay 2 due</i>
05/15	Festival of Spiritual Formation & Closure	<i>Final forms due, Hugggett read</i>